The Higher Education Executive Issues Study

Executive Summary Report

January 2007

Conducted & Reported by:

DRC GROUP Incorporated
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Sponsored by:

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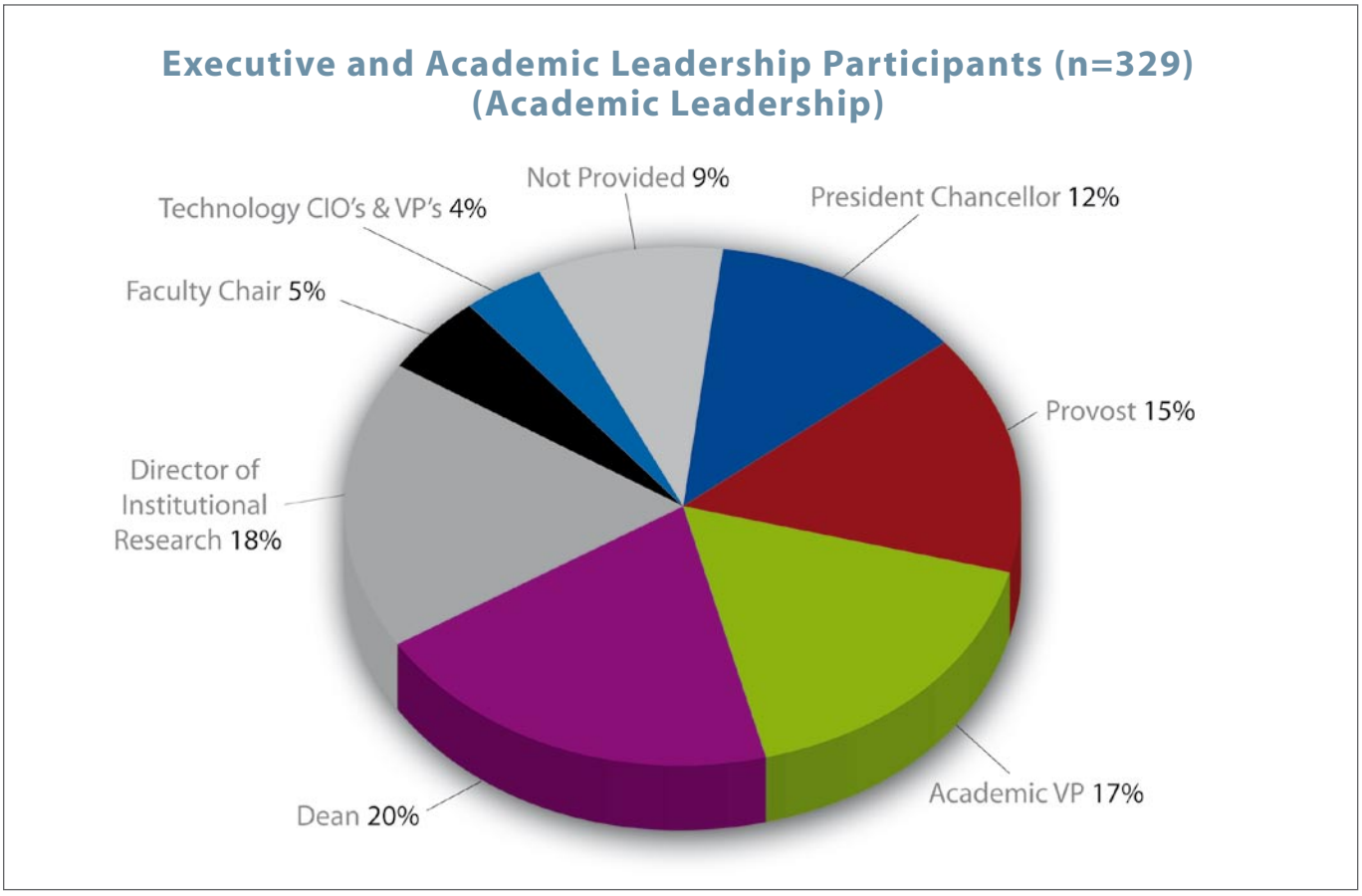
BACKGROUND

The following report represents the summary findings from an extensive quantitative study that Blackboard underwrote to identify and understand the key issues on which higher education leaders are most focused.

Blackboard conducted a series of one-on-one interviews with campus and system leaders over a period of six months in 2006. The findings are summarized in its recent white paper, "View from the Top: Building the 21st Century Campus." As an extension of this qualitative research, Blackboard commissioned a companion study that employed two online surveys conducted by an independent research organization, the DRC GROUP, in October and November 2006.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

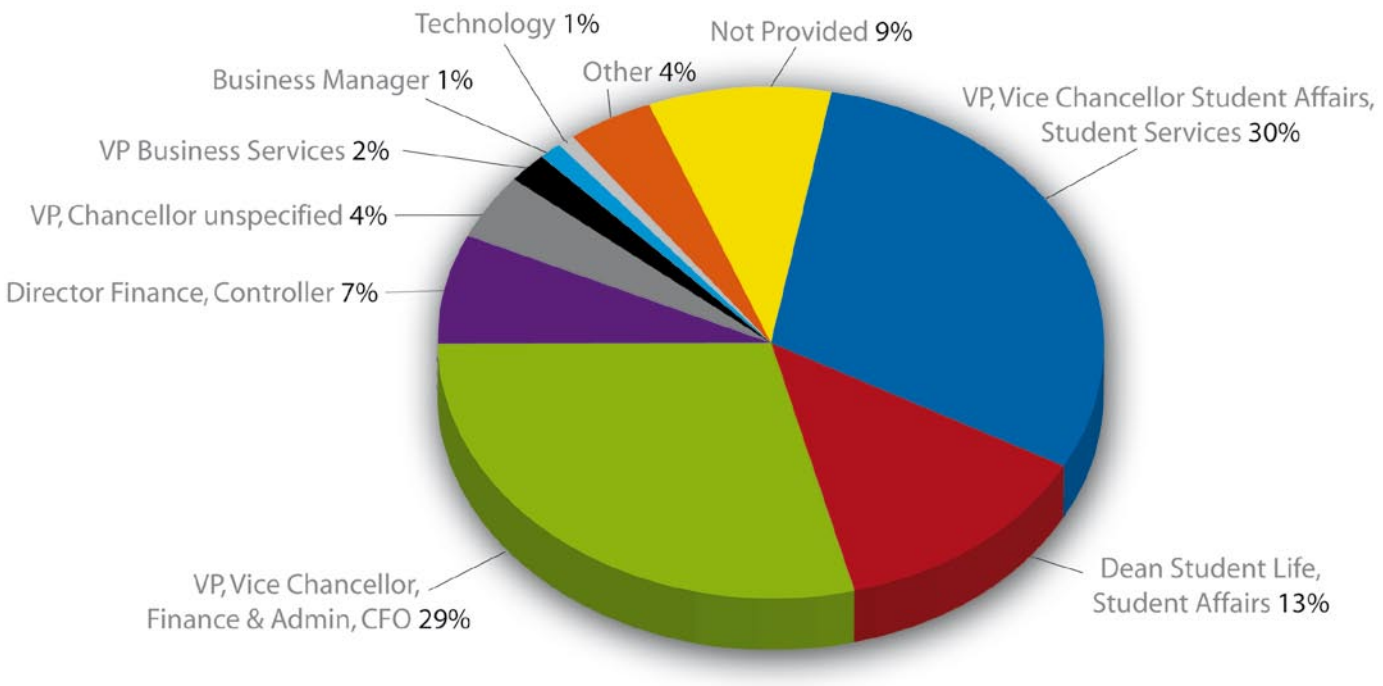
The participants consisted of 557 leaders from a wide cross section of more than 500 institutions, both in size and educational profile. They reflected a balanced group of executive campus leadership and academic and student services leaders.



Key titles included Presidents, Chancellors, Provosts, Academic Vice Presidents, Deans and Directors of Institutional Research, along with selected faculty chairpersons, for a total of 329 campus and academic leaders.

In addition, a parallel survey was conducted with 228 student services leaders to obtain insight into the emerging emphasis on student services.

Student Services, Finance and Administration Leadership (n=228) (Student Services Leadership)



Distribution of Institutions (n=557)

4-Year Comprehensive	27%
2-Year Community College	30%
Liberal Arts	15%
Research	9%
Multi-Site State System	5%
Proprietary	4%
Technical/Vocational	2%
Health Sciences	2%
Other	6%

Distribution by FTE (n=557)

Less than 2,000 students	36%
2,000 to 4,000 students	19%
4,000 to 8,000 students	19%
8,000 to 15,000 students	12%
More than 15,000 students	13%

METHODOLOGY & DEFINITIONS

36% of the participant schools had fulltime enrollments of fewer than 2,000 students. There was an equal mix of larger schools as noted in the table above right.

Participants were invited at random to join in this study which consisted of a set of two parallel questionnaires administered online during October and November 2006. The study goal was to identify the key issues they face leading their institutions into the 21st century and learn more about them.

The study employed a series of aided interrogatories which were developed from the in-depth one-on-one interview series. These questions were organized into four major themes, which were broken into 46 sub issues, to provide more specificity for the two leadership profiles. Participants were asked to rate their agreement across these sub issues as to whether they were among their own list of leadership priorities. The report refers to these as "Aided" responses.

To avoid bias and capture unique issues in their own words, participants were also asked to identify their top priorities, the ones on which they are personally working. This approach yielded an additional 1,700 responses, which are referred to in the report as "Unaided" responses.

OVERVIEW

The participants reflect two groups which are classified for easier reading as "Academic Leadership" (n=329) and "Student Services Leadership" (n=228). The profile of these two groups is described in the previous section.

Academic leaders provided a host of priority issues, but they all can be categorized into one of four themes: Student Engagement, Accountability, Funding and Campus Management. Student Engagement was the most prevalent theme, which represented 600 (35%) of the 1,700 personal priorities provided by the two waves of participants. Accountability (24%) was a close second for academic leaders, while less so for student services leaders. Funding issues (16%) resonated with all audiences, but yielded a more narrowly focused set of discrete sub issues, as did Accountability. Campus Management was a sizeable concern for most academic leaders, particularly with respect to faculty and staff issues.

Academic leadership generated more than 30 specific issues in their four themes. In addition, a majority found agreement with 10 of the issues that were proposed to them from the previous one-on-one interview study. In short, they have a lot on their plate.

The Top 10 Unaided Issues for Academic Leaders (% mentions)

1.	Accountability & Assessment	46%
2.	Campus Management	41%
3.	Program & Curriculum Development	29%
4.	New Revenue & Fundraising	25%
5.	Student Retention	24%
6.	Enrollment Management & Growth	23%
7.	Faculty Development, Quality & Recruiting	23%
8.	Other Technology	17%
9.	Capital Needs	15%
10.	Community Partnering	13%

The Top 10 Aided Issues for Academic Leaders (% agreeing with them)

1. Strengthening assessment processes across the institution (86%)
2. Addressing the expectations of accrediting bodies for the assessment of student learning outcomes (78%)
3. Finding additional revenue through academic program growth (65%)
4. Developing in students the skill sets sought by major employers in the region and nationally (62%)
5. Enhancing the quality of student life while at the institution (61%)
6. Providing multi-cultural learning and living experiences both on and off campus (61%)
7. Increasing faculty adoption of technology on par with students' expectations and needs (57%)
8. Addressing remediation needs for incoming students (54%)
9. Providing convenient academic programs for adult and continuing learners (53%)
10. Increasing access for under-represented populations to enhance diversity (50%) & Slowing down tuition increases (50%)

STUDENT SERVICES LEADERSHIP VIEWPOINT

The key issues identified by student services leaders were thematically similar to those identified by academic leaders. However, the more specific sub issues, which they provided in open-ended feedback or responded to from a list of choices, were tailored towards their specific charter.

Effective, expanded student engagement is the core mission for student services leaders. It is measured by one major objective: to retain and graduate students. Unlike their academic counterparts, the "academic qualifier" piece did not surface as part of the equation (improved education quality, preparation for life, diverse students and faculty). Everything else is a strategic component to deliver student retention and graduation, or a tactic to support the strategy: money, facilities (mostly non-classroom), virtual/human/financial support, 21st century technology delivery, campus life.

These specific issues can be summarized into four priorities:

1. Retain and Graduate More Students
2. Deliver Enhanced Student Services and Access Outside the Classroom, in an Integrated or Holistic Campus Life
3. Do More with Less, but Provide Resources to Those in Need
4. Require Resource Allocation Based on Measured Performance

The Top 12 Unaided Issues for Student Services Leaders (% mentions)

1.	Retention & Graduation Rates	27%
2.	Learning Outcomes Assessment	15%
3.	Campus Life Enhancement	14%
4.	Student Access, Online Services	13%
5.	Building & Maintenance	11%
6.	Technology Driven Enhancements	11%
7.	Controlling Tuition and Other Costs	10%
8.	Funding & Revenue	9%
9.	Financial Aid & Management	8%
10.	Customer (Student) Service Quality	8%
11.	Student Housing	8%
12.	Student Engagement Outside Campus	7%

The Top 10 Aided Issues for Student Services Leaders (% agreeing with them)

1. Providing timely, efficient administrative and support services that are easy to access and use (80%)
2. Improving student retention rates (75%)
3. Seeking new sources of revenue outside the campus (67%)
4. Creating a safe and secure environment for campus residents (57%)
5. Creating an ability to track resource usage and use information to reduce costs, improve productivity and measure student success (56%)
6. Defining and addressing needs for new students (54%)
7. Increasing adoption of technology initiatives on a par with students' expectations and needs (53%)
8. Developing a disaster preparedness and business continuity capability (53%)
9. Finding additional revenue through academic program growth (50%)
10. Slowing down tuition increases or making tuition more affordable (50%)

I. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The single largest concern for most leaders revolved around serving students–from enrolling more of them, preparing and retaining them, to graduating them on time.

There were three significant Student Engagement sub issues identified by Academic leaders: 1) the need for improved program and curriculum development, 2) improving student retention and 3) enrollment management. A healthy emphasis was placed on upgrading the curriculum and quality of academic delivery, from content to experience.

Student services leaders were focused on the non-academic experience, with a goal to integrate their campus life with the academic mission in order to create a more holistic on-campus and off-campus experience. They viewed this mission as key to improving student retention and graduation rates, their number one objective. In particular, they are working on delivering significant enhancements to campus life, improved student access, the physical infrastructure that is a major component of these needs and the technology to bring many of these action items to fruition.

Unaided Response Summary for Student Engagement Issues
Academic Leaders (n=329)

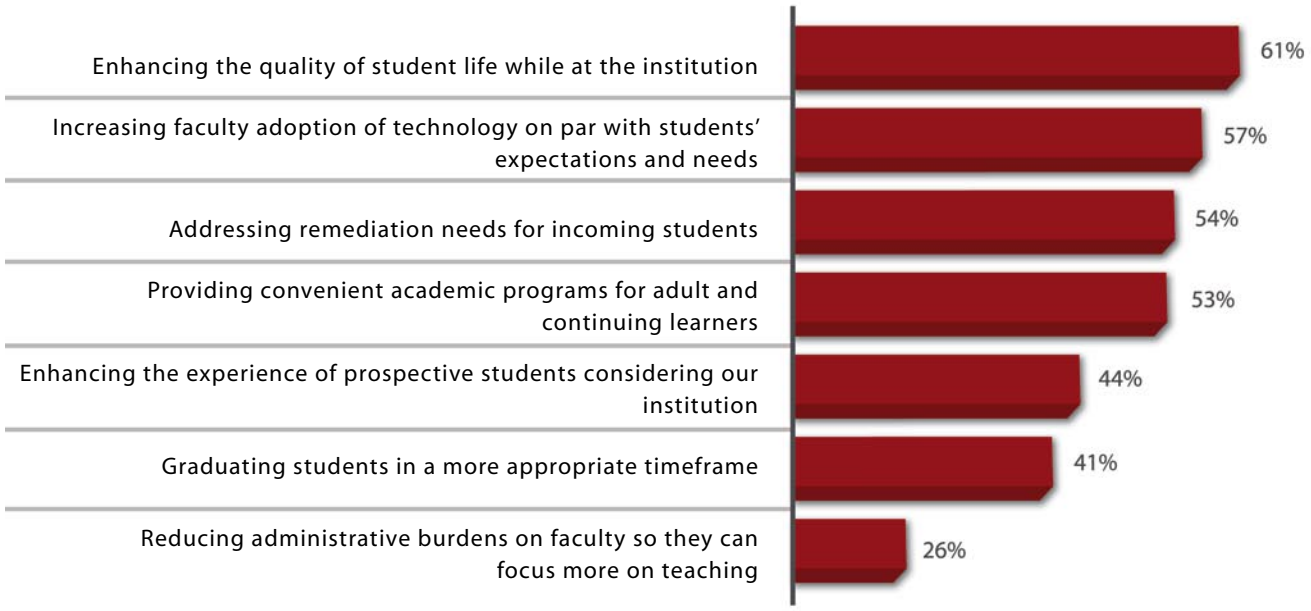
Program & Curriculum Development	29%
Retention	24%
Enrollment	23%
Faculty Technology Adoption	12%
First Year & Ongoing Student Experience	12%
Quality Student Life	5%
Distance Learning	5%
Remediation	5%
Continuing Education	1%

- Presidents and VP's were much more interested in providing convenient academic programs for adults.
- Technologists were particularly concerned with the faculty adoption of technology to reach par with students, as well as enhancing the experience of the prospective student, but the majority of participants agreed this was a priority.
- Directors, many of Institutional Research, were most focused on remediation for incoming students.
- Looking at the overall theme of student engagement, ranging from their academic experience to campus life, it was clear that this theme was at the forefront of everyone's priorities, regardless of leadership role.

Unaided Response Summary for Student Engagement Issues
Student Services Leaders (n=228)

Retention & Graduation Rates	27%
Campus Life Enhancement	14%
Student Access, Online Services	13%
Building & Maintenance	11%
Technology Driven Enhancements	11%
Customer (Student) Service Quality	8%
Student Housing	8%
Student Engagement Outside Campus	7%
Student Advising & Orientation	5%
Enrollment Management	4%

Aided Response Summary for Student Engagement Issues
Academic Leaders (n=329)



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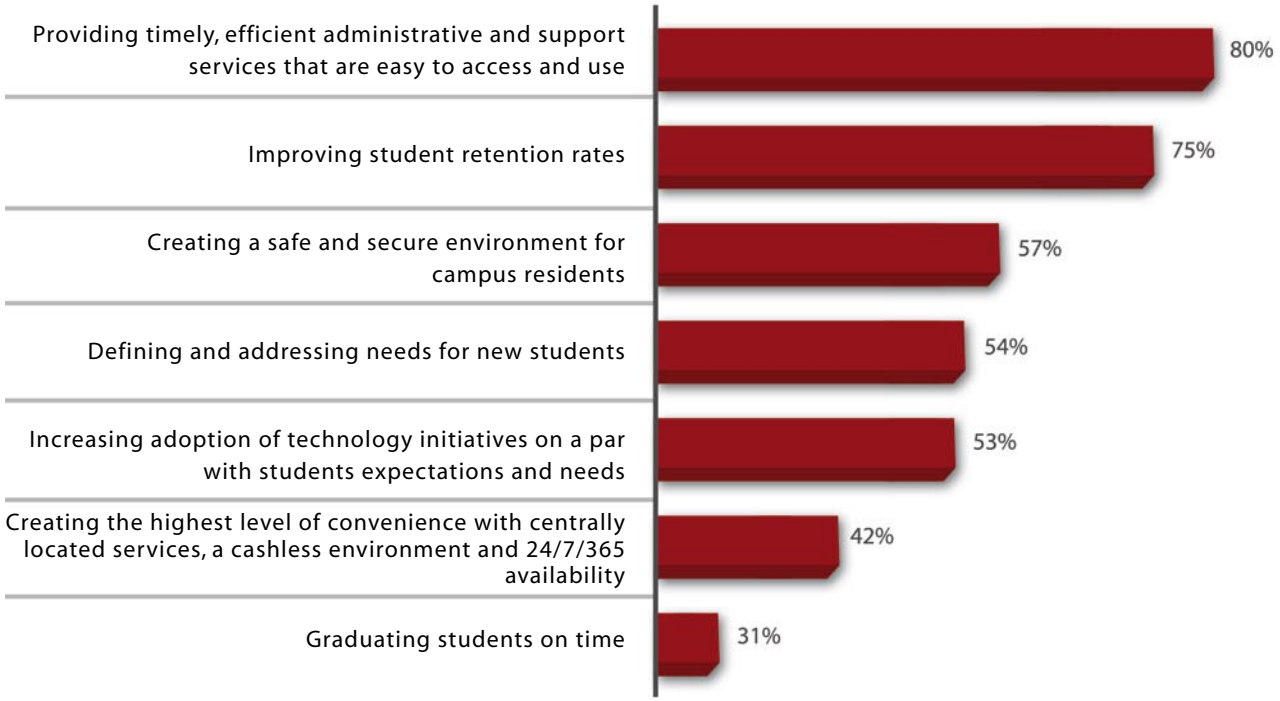


II. ACCOUNTABILITY & ASSESSMENT

The strongest proponents for Accountability & Assessment issues were Directors of Institutional Research and Faculty Chairs, but this was an important theme no matter what role was held in the first wave of academic leaders. They are concerned about their ability to implement "accountability," both in terms of functioning systems as well as a campus-wide commitment, through the faculty and campus staff. The theme of accountability and assessment doesn't have the depth of tactical elements that student engagement does, but it creates strong links with the other major themes of funding, campus management and certainly student engagement. In fact, among academic leaders it was the single most often mentioned issue out of several dozen that surfaced.

When academic leaders were queried with issues that were derived from the one-on-one interviews there was near universal agreement that 1) strengthening assessment and 2) delivering what was necessary for accreditation agencies and their communities, were foremost on their minds.

The student services leaders were much less likely to state they had accountability concerns: their issues and solutions were less on the academic side, but clearly focused on student engagement.

Unaided Response Summary for Accountability & Assessment Issues
Academic Leaders (n=329)

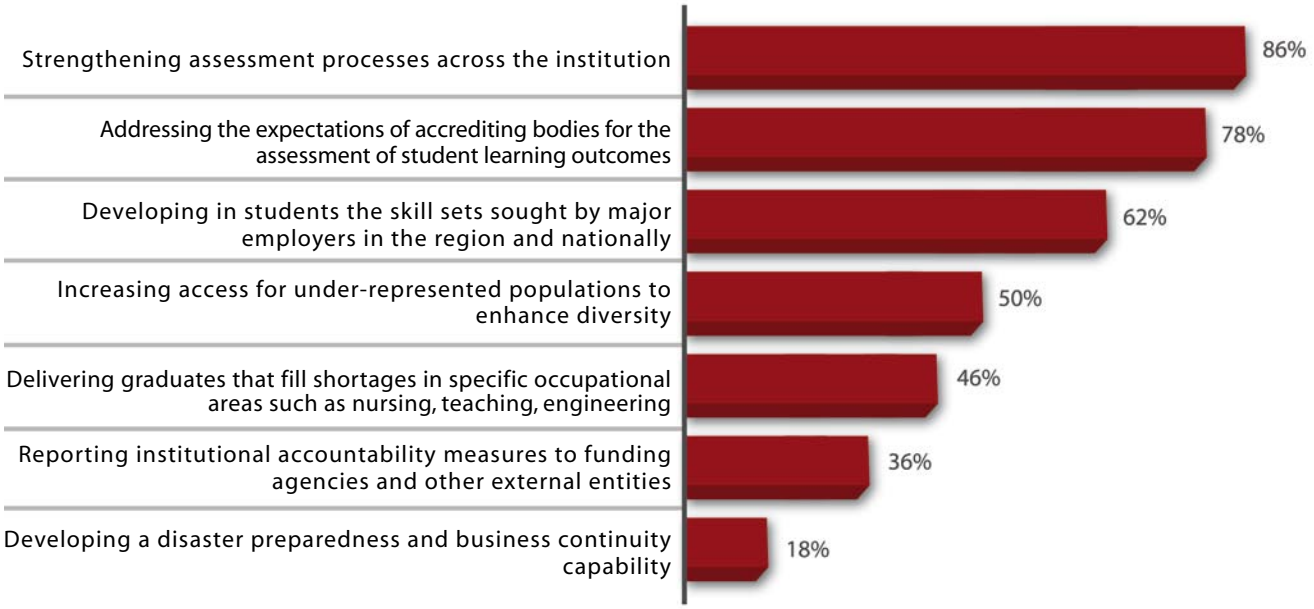
Accountability & Assement General Concept	50%
Community Partnering	13%
Strategic Planning	11%
Student or Faculty Diversity	10%
Accreditation	8%
Inproved Academic Quality	8%
Data Use for Management	7%
Disaster Recovery	2%

- "Strengthening assessment processes across the institution" was ranked high by all types of leaders, as was accreditation.
- Presidents, Deans and VP's were most interested in delivering students who can meet employer expectations (particularly those at two-year schools).
- Provosts stood out in their quest for diversity of the student population.

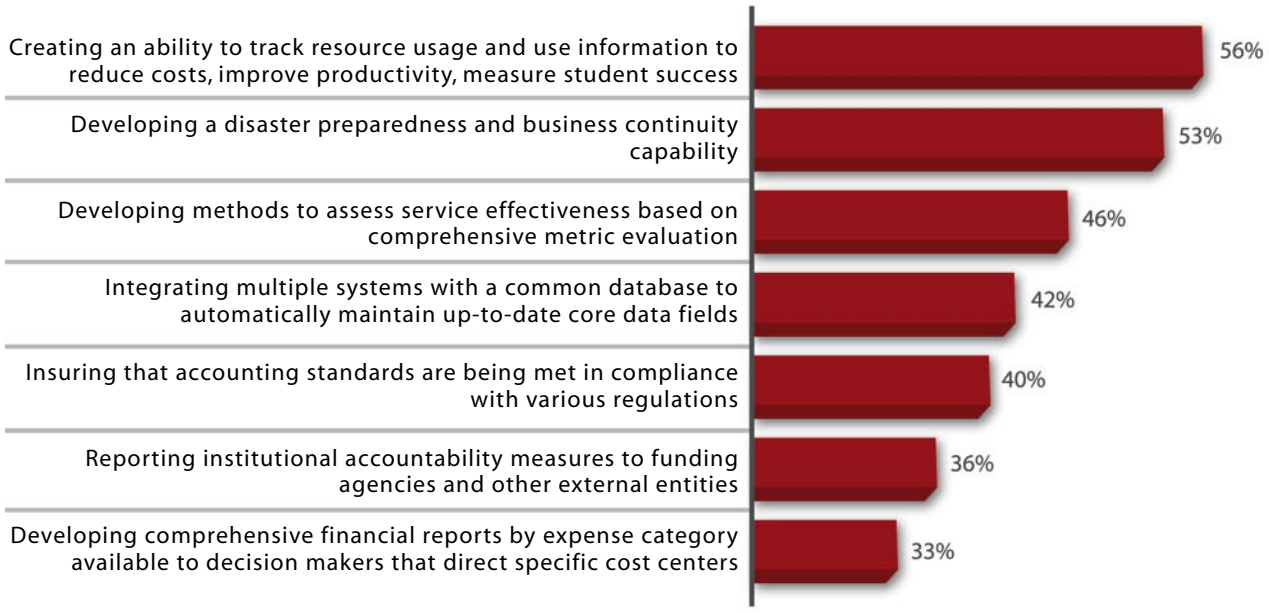
Unaided Response Summary for Accountability & Assessment Issues
Student Services Leaders (n=228)

Learning Outcomes Assessment	15%
Assessment of Student Services	3%

Aided Response Summary for Accountability & Assessment Issues
Academic Leaders (n=329)



Aided Response Summary for Accountability & Assessment Issues
Student Services Leaders (n=228)



III. FUNDING

Presidents and chancellors were much more concerned with Funding issues. They also tended to be more concerned with capital needs and community partnering, although finance and student services leaders were very consumed by building and maintenance upgrades, with an emphasis on student housing.

There was a mix of plans and concerns about how to generate revenue through public resources (grants, state and federal support, financial aid at the student level) to those somewhat under their control (selected fees, load balancing tuition, student services). A few still reject the accountability requirement imposed by a skeptical community or the idea that a learning institution should be maximizing revenue yield through the student services which their "customers" are seemingly willing to pay. Most, however, are fully committed to the idea of recognizing they have customers and they should deliver what they want and need to be successful after graduating. It should be noted that the attitude of market focus was much more prevalent among community colleges. The sensitivity to tuition increases was not as strong among four-year and graduate institutions. Controlling tuition increases resonated with student services leaders. They also identified the need to increase financial aid and counseling for potential students and their families and provide better financial management advice for students once enrolled.

Universally, generating more funds through a broader base of resources was deemed a critical strategy to meet an expanded mission.

Unaided Response Summary for Funding Issues
Academic Leaders (n=329)

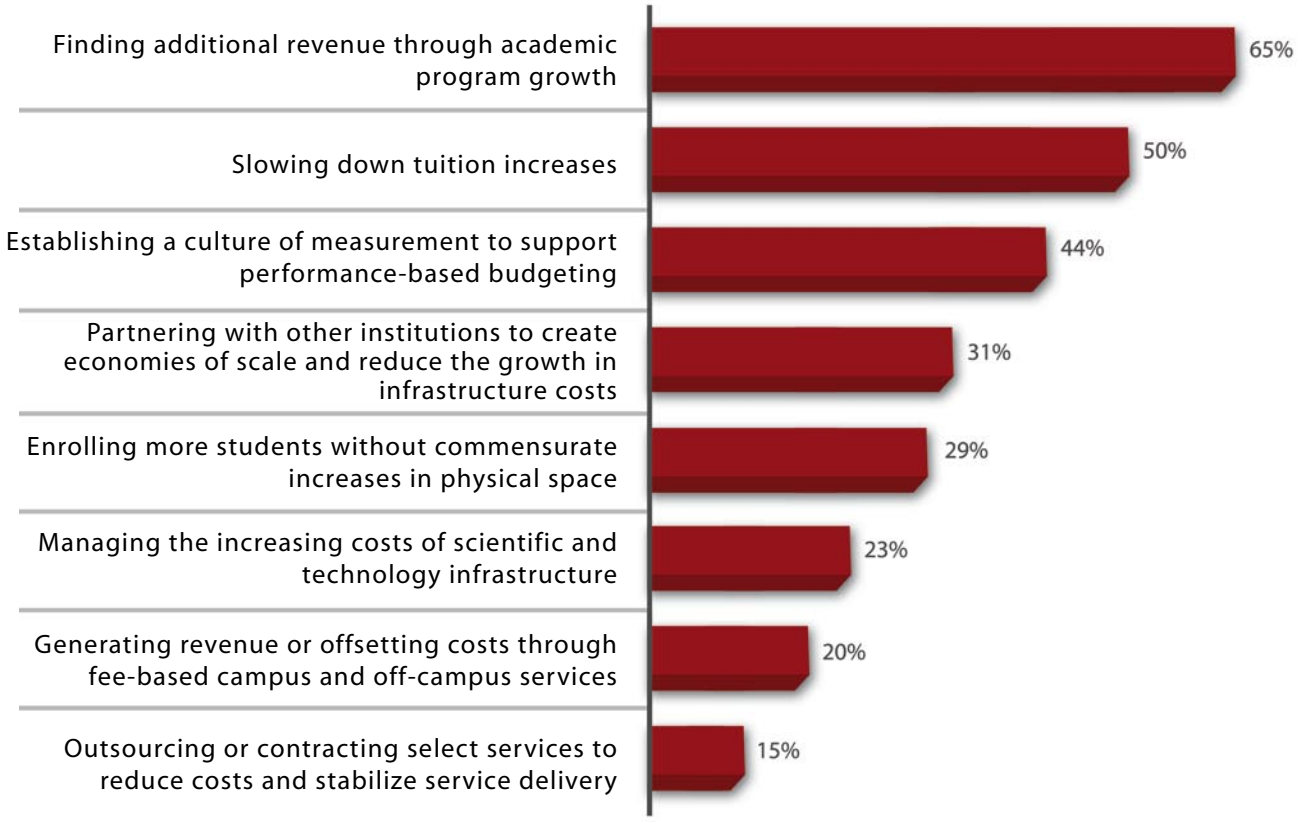
New Revenue & Funding General Issues	25%
Capital Needs	15%
Performance Budgeting	5%
Scarce Resource Management	5%
Student Aid	4%
Technology Costs	4%
Partnering	3%
Faculty Salaries	3%

- Presidents, Provosts and VP's all rated "finding additional revenue sources" high on their priority list.
- Deans were the standouts concerned with slowing down tuition increases when prompted with an aided response, but this barely registered in the unaided portion which preceded these structured lists. Student services leaders were more likely to bring this up unaided than their academic counterparts.
- Technologists were the champions for "enrolling more students without commensurate increases in space."

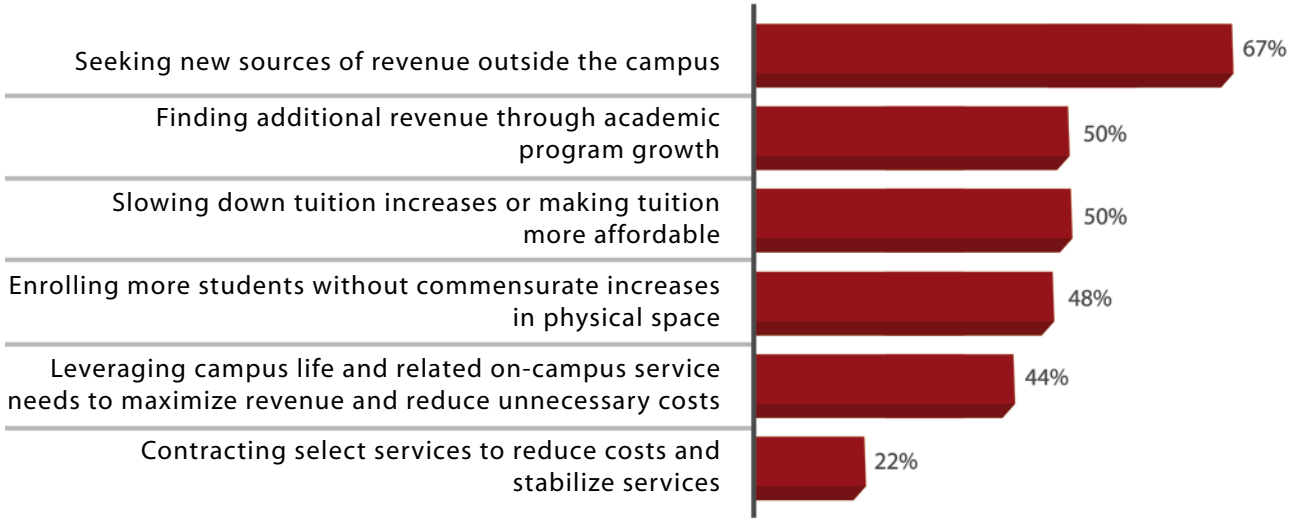
Unaided Response Summary for Funding Issues
Student Services Leaders (n=228)

Controlling Tuition & Other Costs	10%
Funding & Revenue	9%
Financial Aid & Counseling	8%
Budget Allocation	5%

Aided Response Summary for Funding Issues
Academic Leaders (n=329)



Aided Response Summary for Funding Issues
Student Services Leaders (n=228)



IV. CAMPUS MANAGEMENT

Provosts, VP's and Deans were more interested in Campus Management issues than other leaders. A big component of this theme, faculty development issues, resonated most with Provosts and Deans, with similar focus on program and curriculum development. Management issues included communicating a vision across the campus, gaining staff and faculty buy-in and other classic organizational management issues: reorganization of administration and academics, morale, efficiencies and productivity, personnel, competition and marketing and managing change.

Unaided Response Summary for Campus Management Issues
Academic Leaders (n=329)

Management Issues	41%
Faculty Development & Recruiting	23%
Other Technology Issues	17%
Faculty Workload	3%

COMMON GROUND

At a macro level almost all of the leadership who shared their priorities in this study met on common ground with respect to four areas: 1) the need to recruit, retain and graduate students from diverse backgrounds with a quality educational experience, 2) measure progress in a transparent manner using defined plans and metrics, 3) establish better communications and shared goals across campus and 4) find new sources of revenue to pay for these goals.

At the strategic level, academic leadership focused more on the educational aspects of this mission, concerned with the product, the methods and the delivery vehicles (faculty, technology, content). Student services leaders provided a strong emphasis on the complementary and more revolutionary delivery of enhanced campus life. These enhancements come at no small cost as schools aspire to improve the cost-contained physical infrastructure with private sector accoutrements to enhance campus life. Add to that the processes for 24 x 7 student access and streamlined processes and they have a sizeable challenge. Academic leaders face more of a leadership struggle getting faculty on board with some of these pedagogical and technological changes. It will be interesting to see which strategies are achieved first, how funds are raised and allotted and certainly, how measurement is implemented.

2-YEAR SCHOOLS VERSUS 4-YEAR SCHOOLS

Two-year schools are much more concerned with a host of issues that relate to training the student population to succeed in the post-academic world, meeting community needs, employer needs, adult education and tuition rates.

Four-year schools are more concerned with internal issues (diversity, faculty compensation) and to a lesser extent, globalization concerns.

Both two-year and four-year schools share concerns for student life and assessment issues, regardless of type of institution.

DIFFERENCES BY SIZE OF SCHOOL

Schools with fewer than 4,000 students were more concerned with campus management and strategic planning adoption. Those with fewer than 2,000 students were more concerned with faculty development and quality and funding. Schools with more than 4,000 students tended to be more concerned with faculty adoption of technology on a par with students and with the general theme of student engagement.

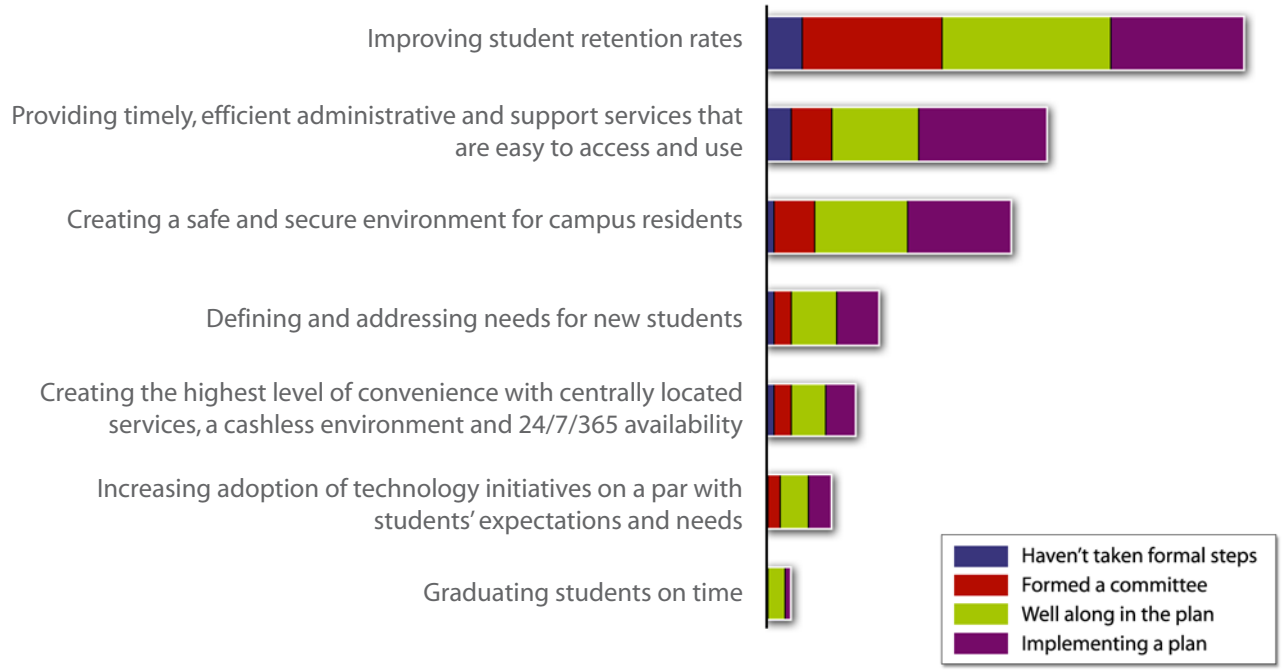
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this quantitative study supports the findings from the one-on-one interview process and expands on them:

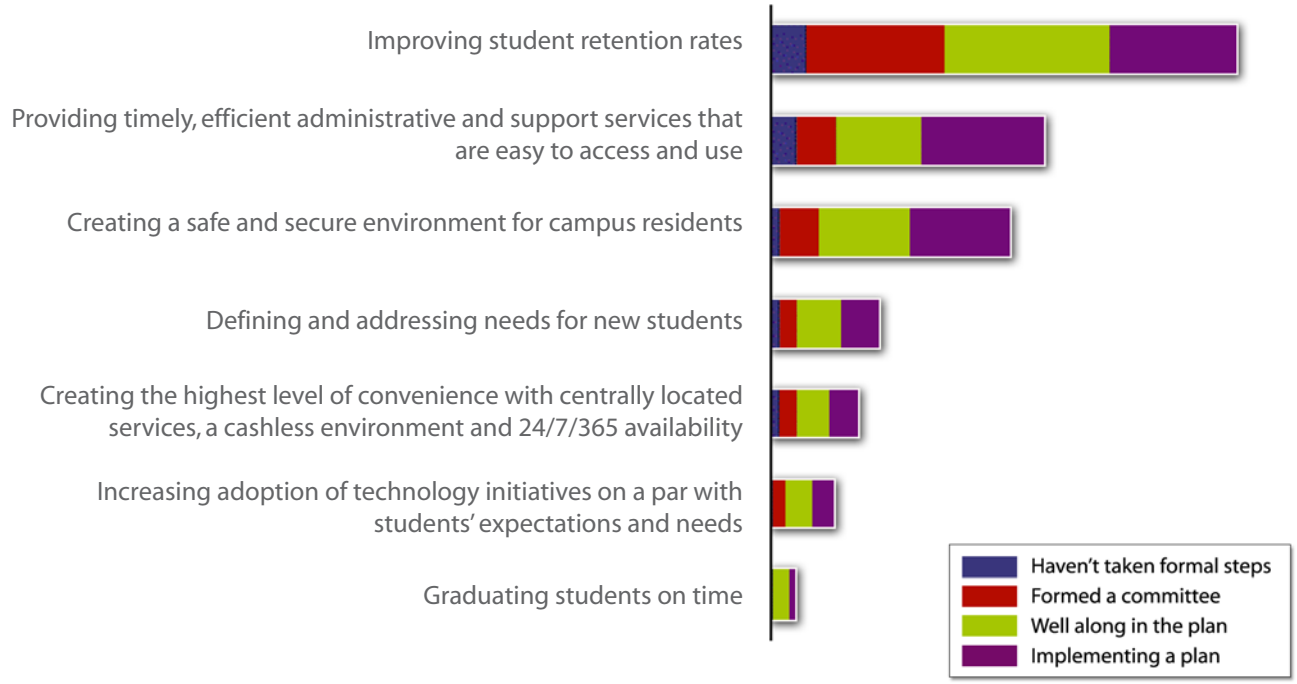
> The 21st century campus is the subject of the major intitiatives for change, based on goals to help students towards successful graduation and life skills, using a plethora of academic and non-academic experiences that go well beyond core curriculum.
>
> All leaders involved are a part of driving this change through their professional colleagues and staff, using new funding mechanisms and accountability measures and meeting student expectations for technology and a much higher level of customer-focused campus life.

APPENDIX: PROGRESS REPORT

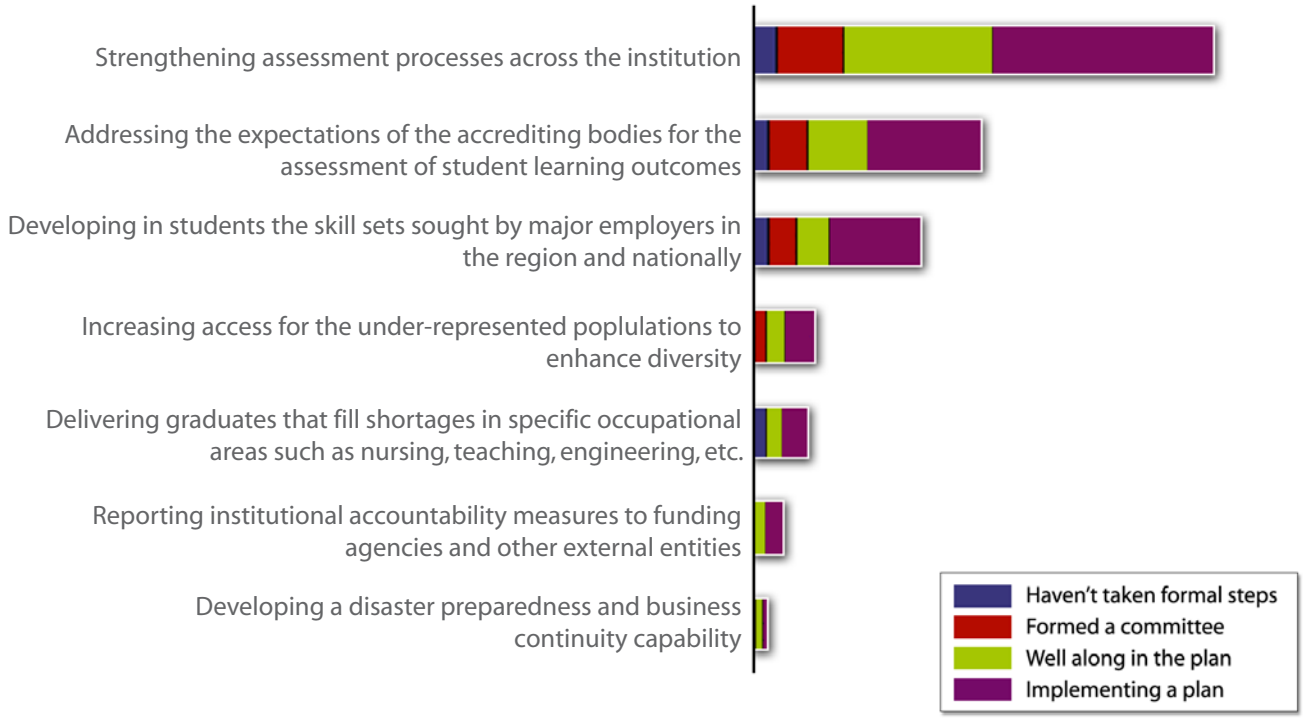
Progress Report: Student Engagement
Academic Leaders (n=329)



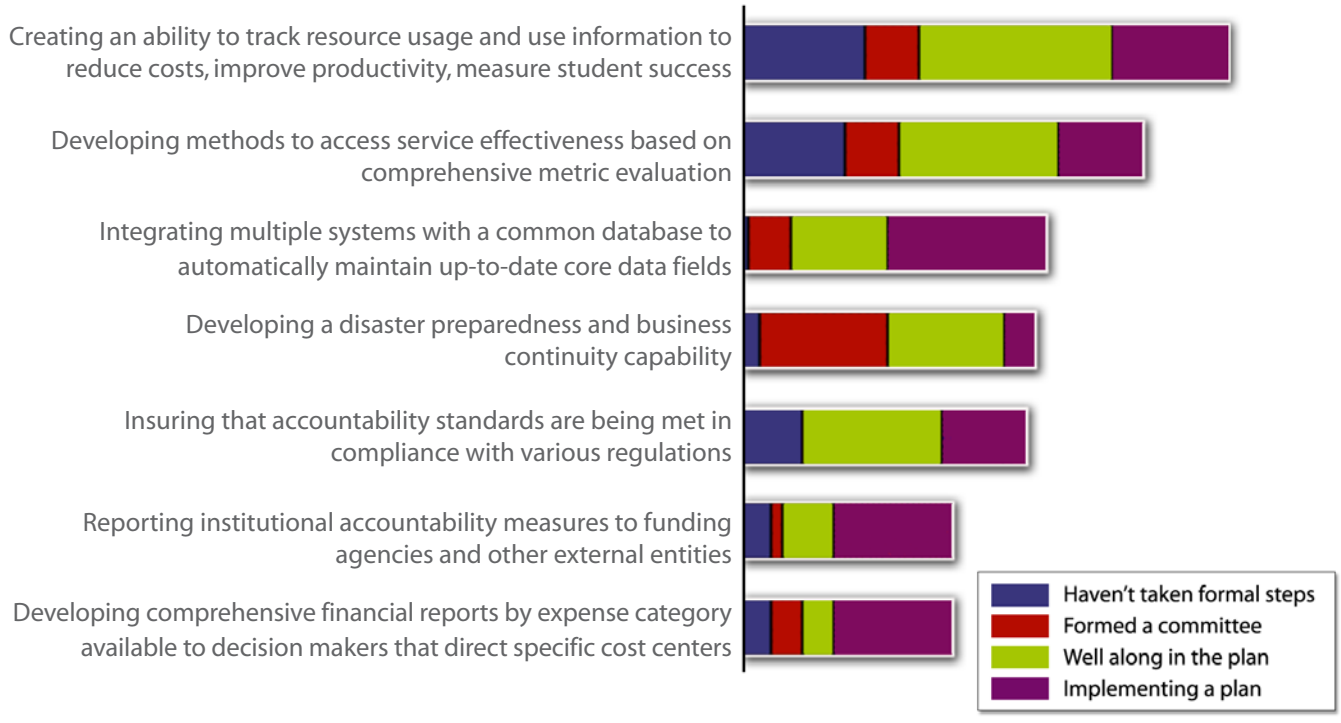
Progress Report: Student Engagement
Student Services Leaders (n=228)



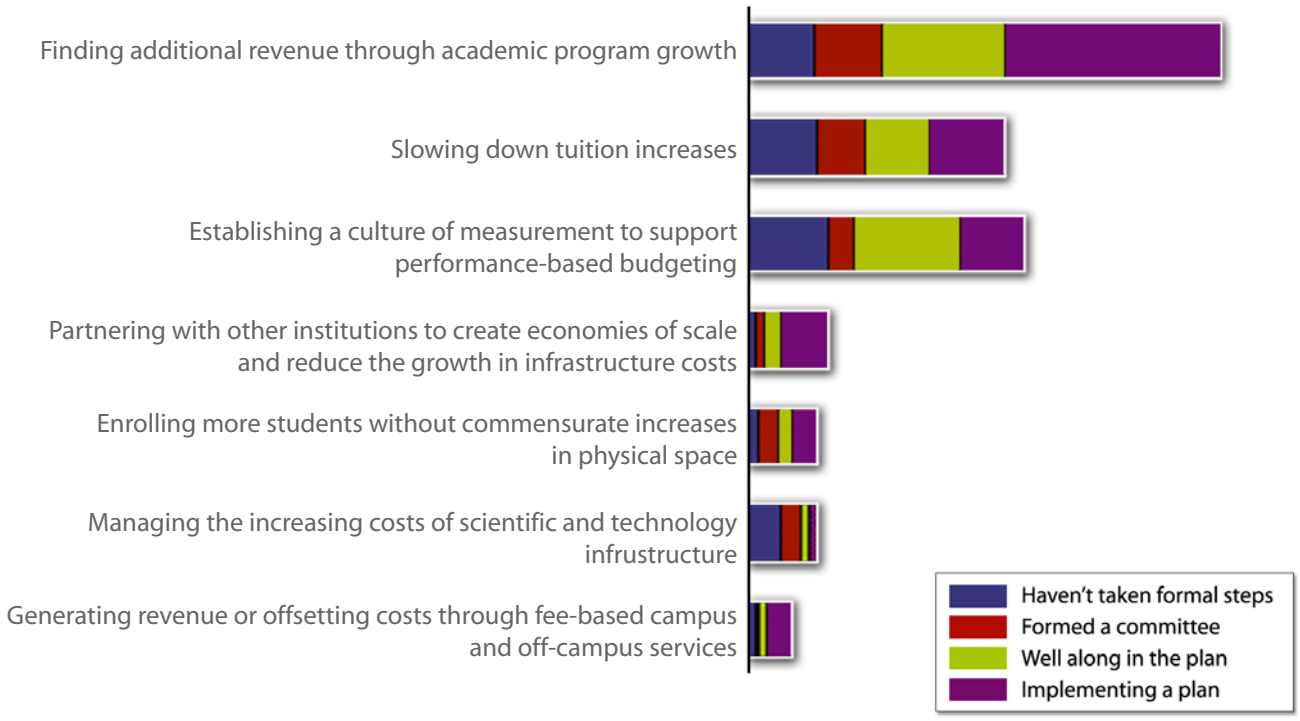
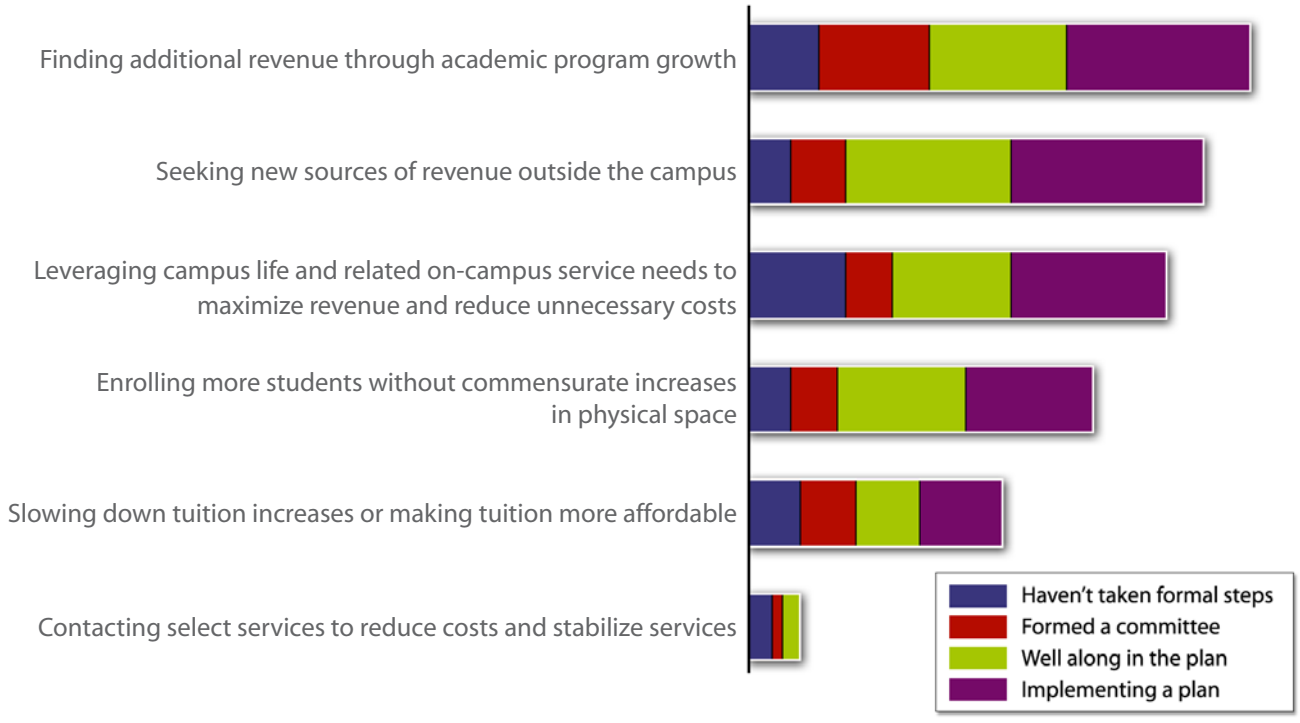
Progress Report: Student Accountability & Assessment
Academic Leaders (n=329)



Progress Report: Student Accountability & Assessment
Student Services Leaders (n=228)



Progress Report: Funding
Academic Leaders (n=329)



Progress Report: Funding
Student Services Leaders (n=228)